

Bible Basics Conference 2015: The church

Part 3

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[00:00:00] I'm really pleased, it's my privilege to speak about assembly gatherings.

And this may seem a rather unconventional start to this subject.

Two thousand years ago, the world said no to the Lord Jesus.

People like us gave him the center cross and carried on without him.

But he rose from the dead, went back to heaven and formed his assembly, as we've been hearing from our other brothers.

And that assembly is formed of people like us.

Christians, those who've trusted the Lord Jesus as their savior, who love to be with [00:01:05] him, give him the center, all the honor, full control.

Do we?

Well, the subject of assembly meetings, assembly gatherings, is really about this fact, that the Lord Jesus is in the center and he has full control.

The world has said, we don't want you. Where on this earth does the Lord Jesus have full control today?

It should be in the assembly, it can't be anywhere else.

And the local gatherings of his people are where that principle should be on display when they come together.

[00:02:01] That's really my exercise and I'm sure the exercise of those who put this session in the schedule for today's meetings.

Now we've already spoken about Matthew chapter 18, but Hans Rudi spoke about Matthew chapter 16, first of all, where the Lord Jesus speaks about my assembly.

And where the assembly in its most expansive sense, remember, we spoke about the assembly as being all those who believe on the Lord Jesus from the day of Pentecost until the Lord Jesus comes, it could be today, the rapture.

They all make up the assembly in that aspect. But he also spoke about the fact that the assembly is also seen in scripture more often than not as all those alive on the planet at any given time, they make up that assembly [00:03:05] and it is complete in that sense.

And when we look at it in that way, it's wonderful to hear the Lord's words, my assembly, the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

That's the grandest, most powerful way in which we see the assembly in scripture and the Lord Jesus says, I will build and it's all his work and that's why it's seen in that wonderful way.

But in Matthew chapter 18, just two chapters on in this gospel, we see the Lord Jesus speak about the assembly in another setting and that's also been spoken about by our brothers already spoken about in its local setting and the Lord Jesus speaks about it first of [00:04:01] all in that setting in verse 17 of Matthew chapter 18, a few verses on he speaks of the way the assembly meets as the assembly and not just as any group of people.

That's the Greek.

But thankfully, well, I think you can possibly see that it's the verse because four words along there's a word that looks to me a bit like duo and the sixth word.

If you think of the letter that looks like a P is really an R and that reminds me of the French word tres three.

So you can see that this indeed is the verse for where two or three are gathered together in or perhaps more exactly to my name there am I in the midst of them and each of these [00:05:09] words has weight and significance.

And this is what Paul means in one Corinthians 11 verse 18 when he speaks about coming together in the church or to me more exact in assembly Roberts already mentioned to us that a number of times in scripture God doesn't use the definite article if I can put it that way it's left out and that means it has a characteristic sense a characteristic meaning when we come together in the church in assembly in an assembly way as we actually are as those who [00:06:02] form this wonderful vessel that we've been speaking about already today and that's something that we do locally.

We can't come together with everybody who forms the assembly around the world. It's a geographical physical impossibility. Our privilege is to do it with all those who form the assembly locally and that's the sad thing isn't it we can't do that. We can't do that because so much division has

come in down the centuries down what's sometimes called the Christian centuries has been a history of fragmentation of the very opposite to what we heard about when the Lord Jesus prayed that they all might be one.

We are all one in God's sight but in a practical way we're not and it's important to understand [00:07:03] that just as every believer forms the assembly in this world every believer in a locality forms that local assembly in God's eyes. I think sometimes we forget this for instance I come from a place called Ipswich in Suffolk who forms the local assembly in Ipswich.

Is it just those who gather to the name of the Lord Jesus at a particular hall in that place or is it every believer on the Lord Jesus who lives in Ipswich. I think we'll find very clearly from scripture that it's the second every single believer on the Lord Jesus no matter which place they go to forms the local assembly in that place and it's [00:08:01] important that we maintain this truth else we get into what is called really and truly sectarianism. But more about that later on.

So let's look at the verse in a bit of detail here's London where two or three the local brethren it's interesting isn't it that right at the first mention of the local assembly in scripture the Lord Jesus speaks in terms of two or three. Before even the church age as we sometimes call it began the Lord Jesus saw right to the end of that age in terms of history and he provides for every circumstance even those times and there have been times in the past when this has been true when there have only been two or three but they're still his brethren he still loves them are gathered together sometimes we [00:09:05] read this verse and say where two or three gather together but it doesn't say that it says are gathered together passive tense who gathers them together sometimes I've heard Christians say Lord we invite you into our company but that's never the way it's presented in scripture the Lord Jesus gathers us around him to my name because he's not here but his name signifies his authority it signifies all the attributes we can think of when we think of our blessed Lord all his self-sufficiency in every situation but there he is he says there am I him personally in the midst of them the center of his brethren now when does this happen well I think when we look in scripture we can see that there are three meetings where this [00:10:05] is particularly true where this is principally true where I might even go as far as saying this is only true believers in the first local assembly we heard about it in Jerusalem continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers and these these interests these occupations these activities they're reflected in these three assembly meetings there's the meeting for edification 1 Corinthians chapter 14 sometimes called the open meeting always called the open meeting in the UK I can't understand it really because you know every one of these meetings is an open meeting but we in the UK because it's our way we've called it the open meeting but it's the meeting for edification for building up the breaking of bread sometimes this is called the meeting for worship but it's never called that in scripture and we're going to see [00:11:04] the names which are applied to it in a moment there should be worship in every one of these meetings if the Lord Jesus is in the center why wouldn't you worship the Lord Jesus you can worship him in the prayer meeting we're going to come to that now Matthew chapter 18 verses 19 to 20 in these meetings the assembly has what it had at Pentecost often we hear people say we want that Pentecostal fullness again and they go as far as calling the Holy Spirit to descend on them again of course that happened then and it's not going to happen again it doesn't need to but these three gatherings with the Lord Jesus in the midst and all that he brings when he's in the midst mean that we have what the church had on the day of Pentecost now the New Testament pattern is for [00:12:01] the breaking of bread to be on the first day of the week in Acts 20 verse 7 we read about Paul at Troas and it was the custom of the Christians in that place to gather together for the breaking of bread the others seem to have been regular as well but not only on set

days in other words they could happen at other times for instance the early church when Peter was in jail waiting to be beheaded they prayed for him continually it tells us and when he got out of prison he was able to go to the Saints and what did he find them doing they were there praying for him unfortunately they didn't didn't seem to have a great deal of faith that their prayers would be answered but of course our Lord is a kind and long-suffering Lord sometimes another assembly meeting is necessary so you'll see a little plus one has popped up the top of the slide because we're also told about the meeting for discipline and the Lord Jesus speaks about this in Matthew chapter 18 [00:13:07] as well he calls it binding making a decision loosing rescinding that decision that also is something which is done in an assembly meeting decisions of that kind can only be made by the assembly because that's where the Lord Jesus has placed his authority today but obviously this is only done when it's necessary when there's a matter to be dealt with there are no descriptions of the way assembly meetings were conducted in the early church well perhaps you could look at sorry Acts chapter 15 Robert mentioned which describes what happened there but it's not described in a way we can mimic we can copy as if by ropes the reason for that is that God wants us to follow the leading of our living Lord he's in the midst remember Matthew chapter 18 verse 20 [00:14:07] the Holy Spirit is in us so we can respond to the leading of the Lord Jesus according to as Robert has mentioned the fact that we have the Word of God and it's this that's to be practiced spiritually amongst us if we seek to gather to the name of the Lord Jesus so let's have a look at these meetings in order the meeting for edification spiritual building up Paul writes about this in 1 Corinthians 14 the meeting is man would in purpose because it's about building up we need building up and if you look at 1 Corinthians chapter 14 you'll find that in each of these verses this word edifying is used and it really means house building building erecting strengthening putting up and of course it's being spoken about in a spiritual way we all need to be [00:15:05] built up in Jude we read about being built up on our most holy faith but you'll also notice that in this chapter Paul speaks a lot about prophecy this doesn't mean telling the future I think we've had that a number of times at Bible basics the prophecy really means telling forth the mind of God that may involve telling what's going to happen in the future it certainly did in the Old Testament it does in the book of Revelation but in regard to what we're speaking about now it's principally about hearing what God wants to say at the moment to us telling forth God's word for the assembly for the moment it might involve teaching if you look at these verses in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 you'll see that they mentioned the fact that the prophecy may involve [00:16:02] teaching and it can be by any brother now why have I mentioned this meeting first of all well I can never get up my mind once talking to a sister who's now with the Lord and we were talking about various meetings and different types of meetings and she said to me I can't really forget this she said to me I don't like them open meetings but you know it's a sad thing and in the UK we have really not experienced the blessing of the meeting for edification down down the decades actually and I think it has a serious effect on our on our life as a set of gatherings of God's people in fact I have to say very few Christian very few groups of Christians in this world [00:17:08] practice this the truth that Paul gives in this chapter very very few and no doubt we have as a result become weak as a testimony because we haven't been ready to hear the Lord's word for the moment to the local gathering to those who seek to gather to the name of the Lord there hasn't been an opportunity for the Lord to give us what he wants to say to us just at that moment that we need whatever it might be it might be a correction it might be an encouragement but notice here any brother can do this and I stress that because I've I've come across so many brothers [00:18:04] who said I I don't I can't I don't speak but you know there are gifts listed in the verses 8 to 11 of 1 Corinthians 12 which I think really are gifts which the Lord gives through the Holy Spirit at a particular point in time just there and then and I've heard believe brothers who who who who would never call themselves a teaching brother if I can use such a term not particularly a favorite term of mine I've heard them give a little word in such a meeting as this just right for that moment the Lord's given them that word and if I want to get across

one thing about this meeting it's to say to all the brothers here including myself don't rule yourself out of taking part in this meeting because the Lord can gift you for that moment to give his mind to the local gathering just to clear [00:19:09] up a certain point today prophetic ministries from the Bible but in the early church when we didn't have a Bible when all the scriptures weren't brought together in what we have as the New Testament as well as the Old Testament there were those who could speak God's Word without reference to the written scriptures because they weren't in existence they spoke in a revelatory way and this is what's referred to in 1 Corinthians 14 verse 30 if a brother was speaking and another brother had a revelation then that brother was to sit down and let that one speak because he had something distinct and direct from the Lord for the moment but this ability to speak in this way has gone the prophets in this sense that were there at the beginning of the church were foundational and [00:20:05] they're referred to in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 20 is the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets but prophetic ministry the character of it in giving God's Word for the moment from his written word is still with us and let's not miss it here's a gathering in Nepal it's smaller now because a lot of those believers are now in America and New Zealand and other parts of the world Paul says quench not the spirit don't let the spirit stop you speaking his word if you feel you've got a word from the Lord and brothers and sisters those of us who are listening let us not despise prophesians I was told once that Mr. Heinkel came over here in the 1950s and he couldn't find anywhere where he could speak for the short time I think it was a short time he was here why because [00:21:04] every meeting involved appointed speakers and as a result there was no opportunity for the Lord to use him to speak to his brethren in the UK now of course there's nothing wrong with inviting people to speak or people feeling exercise to saying I would like to speak but it's good to have the opportunity in our local gatherings and we're going to come on to this point Roberts mentioned already how difficult it can be when we're a very small in numbers but in principle we should make sure there's an opportunity for the Lord to speak in the way set out in one Corinthians 14 if therefore the whole church become together into one place this of course was a situation in those days the whole church in a particular locality they met together they weren't divided up as they are as we are today but they were all to be in that one place to hear the word of the Lord for them in that locality and Rob's already emphasized the point forsake not the [00:22:04] assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is two or three should speak two or three sometimes only one when there's weakness but the scripture says two or three witnessing to the Lord's mind two words three words show there's definitely a theme coming from the Lord that he wants his brethren to hear and the rest of us should judge what said that doesn't mean we say oh terrible word that means we should discern it we should we should take it to heart we should we should consider it and we should apply it to our lives should be orderly as befits the God of order I think in Corinth this fragmentation that's very clear around us today was incipient it was there [00:23:01] among the believers even though they were in one place and I feel that in that large gathering if you wanted to hear brother X you went over to that corner and you listen to him and over in that corner brother Y was speaking and all brother wise adherents and fans were listening to him and Paul has to correct that kind of disorder because we have a God of order he speaks we've heard he has one house and when he speaks he speaks clearly distinctly that's in 1 Corinthians 14 to through one brother at a time and unsafe people can benefit as well you know I think gospel meetings are wonderful things to hold and we should hold them but when I when there was an open gathering in when there was a meeting a meeting for edification in the meeting I used to be in in Ipswich I've got to tell you that as far as I know more believe more more more more visitors unbelievers got [00:24:05] converted through what they heard in the open meeting than had ever heard of getting converted through going to the gospel meeting that's not an attack on the gospel meeting please accept this not meant that way but it just shows you the power of gathering to the name of the Lord Jesus and leaving him to decide who should speak and what they should speak the breaking of bread I'm being told not to focus on this so

I'll just be very quick it's in the same part of the letter as the meeting for edification but it comes before it in 1 Corinthians 11 and I think it's most likely that in the early church they met for the breaking of bread they went in as holy priests before they came out as royal priests and spoke about the wonderful things of God to one another it's one of the revelations Paul got from the Lord Jesus in heaven there are four of these and this [00:25:02] is one of them and it's distinctive of the assembly and shows its heavenly character as our brother Hans Rudy has mentioned already by it we show the Lord's death that doesn't mean we're showing it to the world it doesn't say we show forth it says we show in this world which has rejected the Lord Jesus every Lord's Day believers all around the world are showing the Lord's death and I think God the Father takes so much delight in that to see that there are those who remember his son in his death and as it were lift a flag lift a flag for the Lord Jesus in this world which so far as said we don't want you as King we don't have this man to reign over us but every Lord's Day we're lifting a flag not before the world the world doesn't bother they wouldn't understand I don't hold myself with inviting unbelievers in to see the breaking of bread this is something that's [00:26:04] for the Lord and for us but it's pleasurable to the father that he sees those who love the Lord Jesus want to show his death until he come and it's in that act it's in that partaking of that on the table on that loaf wherever it is that loaf in the center that we demonstrate our oneness and remember the Apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians from another location said the bread which we break showing that it's not a question of the loaf symbolizing the unity of just us but there's one loaf our loaf that we break is just a sample of that one loaf and in breaking it together we're demonstrating the oneness of the whole Church of God these are [00:27:04] very important things to bear in mind when you come together in one place just as they were to listen to the Word of God together and not to be absent they were to remember the Lord together it's the Lord's Supper it's his supper when he went to the home of the two Marys they made him a supper it's only a picture I know there but it's his supper it's also a remembrance we do this in remembrance of him it's our response to him it's his supper our response to him and our response to him can be expressed audibly by brothers on behalf of the whole gathering somebody once said to me did you hear that brothers prayer it was marvelous it was an ox and I thought to myself I don't I don't remember anybody else ever saying that to me before and you know it's not for us individually to show off or to pray grand prayers or anything like that is for us to simply [00:28:04] express our hearts worship to the Lord on behalf of the company the prayer is the prayer of the company not any individual in all these gatherings it's not solos we're looking for that's why we don't have musical instruments not just because that's material but because a musical instrument draws attention to the one who's playing it it separates them off from everybody else no we're all together in company around the Lord Jesus he's the one who has the center attraction he is in the midst it's our response to him it's God would the Lord leads us to praise the father let's have some worship to the father flowing out from our remembrance of the Lord Jesus I'm not talking about when you do it don't get me wrong here I'm not going to get into that issue but I'm just saying to you the Lord says that he will lead our praises to his father may there be worship to the father who sent him to be the Savior of the world as well as worship to him and thanks for him coming [00:29:05] here the prayer meeting the Lord Jesus as we've seen spokes about spoke about this in Matthew chapter 18 to pray is to wish towards it's God would meeting it's distinctive of Christians that they pray and every local assembly should meet for prayer we might not be able to hold an open meeting very often because there's so few brothers but there's nothing to stop two brothers praying together prayer was part of assembly life in the early church you can read about it in those verses and we're encouraged to pray as brethren not just as individuals in those verses when the Lord Jesus referred to the local assembly in Matthew 18 he speaks of it in weakness as we've seen brother sitting against brother and just two or three gathered together unto his name it's in this context that he speaks about the prayer meeting how can we know his world and enjoy his help for us as a gathering unless we let him gather us together to his name for prayer with

him [00:30:05] in the midst the meeting for discipline Biden and loosing to keep ordering God's house it should never be a court of law should be a matter of deep humiliation for all of us if we have to deal with a matter of sin amongst us in the Old Testament when the priests offered the sin offering they had to eat it and we should taste in ourselves that the seriousness of sin and accept that the fact that it's happened shows there's been failure on all our parts in one way shape or another it's in the name of the Lord Jesus it's a one Corinthians chapter 5 verse 4 spiritual brothers should take the lead in these things but but and I must emphasize this decision making by the assembly is by the assembly it's only in the assembly not in a brother's meeting [00:31:06] that there is authority in fact there's no reference to brothers meetings that I really know of in Scripture but that's another point but what I will say there is that when decisions are made all must be present so that the issues are known maybe not in every detail but consciences can be engaged and the decision is clearly made by the assembly and we need the sisters present if it's an assembly meeting what about other meetings well in the early church Christians met together for all sorts of reasons I'm running out of time so you'll have to accept I'm going to go through this very quickly but there seems to be a fairly even split from Acts 2 onwards between what were assembly meetings as I've been describing them and what were other kinds of meetings which weren't exactly assembly meetings for instance believers came together to preach the gospel to [00:32:05] encourage one another to go through spiritual exercises to hear a report back from a brother who have been serving the Lord elsewhere and we do need these kinds of activities gospel preaching camps conferences Bible basics is not an assembly meeting but it's great that we're able to speak together about the assembly and assembly meetings at it so it's good to have a variety of activity as long as we keep to spiritual principles so brothers leave your baseball hats at home for every time you come together and sisters do bring your head covering because whenever we pray or prophesy and that's not just the brother who's standing up but it's you as well your head should be covered in the presence of the Lord the teaching about this in 1 Corinthians 11 is in the part of the letter that comes before Paul goes on to gatherings together so the idea that we only [00:33:06] wear head coverings as sisters when we're at assembly meetings is not scriptural should be done wherever prayer is made assembly meeting should be the meetings we always attempt because their occasions when the Lord Jesus is in the midst and we function in an assembly way brothers should be ready and willing to take an audible part are we brothers our open meetings are as we call them are not always the kinds of times they should be because we're not exercised we've not been close to the Lord we haven't got a word to give and the sisters have to sit through silences because we have not taken the time to be with the Lord so that he might give us a word for his people that's a word of reproof to me first of all if we're present in peace and hands Rudy emphasizes peace and a right moral condition he will get the glory we'll get the blessing spiritual spontaneity that's what we're looking for when we come together and there's some books [00:34:08] so it's raining outside so you can't go outside so buy these books